METHODS USED IN TEACHING TYPE-
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SUBJECTS
Henrietta A. Grosback

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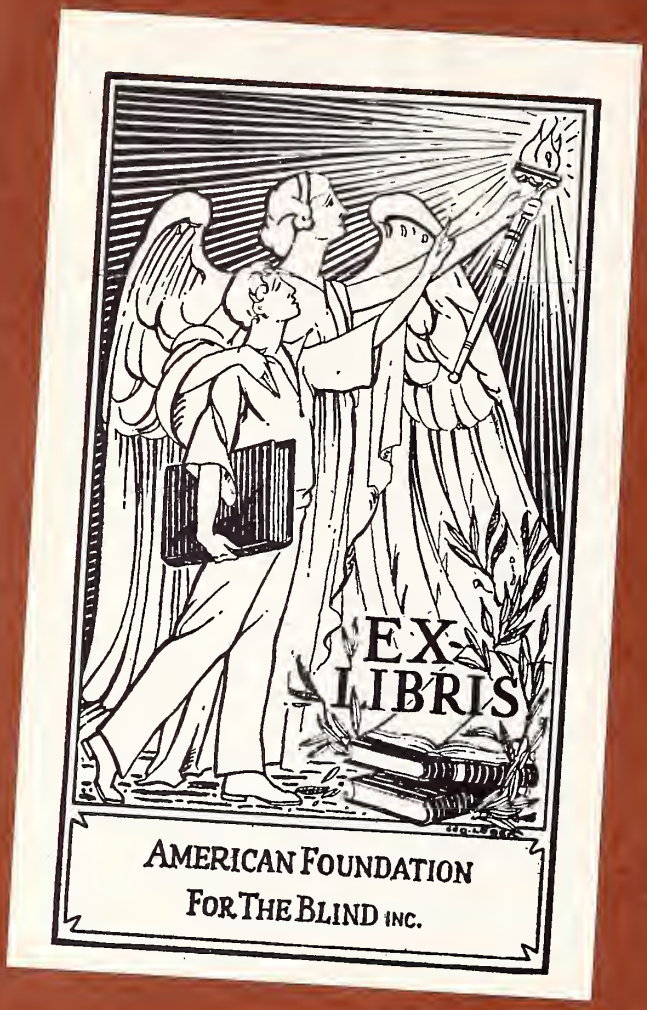
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PART II

METHODS USED IN TEACHING TYPEWRITING AND OTHER COMMERCIAL SUBJECTS

By

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Before going into detail as to the methods I employ in teaching typewriting to those without sight or with very little vision, I should like to speak for a few moments on the evolution of the typewriter, this for a reason which will be made clear later in my talk. As, no doubt, some of you know, the first writing machine was invented by William Austin Burt, of Detroit, Michigan, in 1829. This was called a typographer and was followed by many other attempts both in this country and in Europe, but it was not until 1868 that Christopher Latham Sholes, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, patented the machine he called a typewriter. The year 1868 really marked the beginning of typewriter history. Although this first typewriter had many defects, it did write accurately and fairly rapidly. Twenty-five or thirty different models were made before a machine of commercial value was perfected. In 1873 an apparently satisfactory model was patented by James Densmore, who was by this time associated with Christopher Sholes, and he obtained a contract for its manufacture from E. Remington and Sons, makers of sewing machines. All of the first typewriters wrote capital letters only and had none of the modern devices, such as the back spacer, margin release, tabulator and so forth--the writing, too, was not visible.

The first commercial typewriter appeared on the market in September, 1876 and was known as Model No. 1 Remington. From this time on, the mechanism of the machine has been steadily improved upon. If you have ever seen one of the earlier models, you know that they resemble sewing machines or small pianos. In 1878 Model No. 2 Remington, the first shift-key machine, was produced. Other makes of typewriters soon appeared, among them the Hammond in 1880, the double keyboard Smith Premier in 1890, the Oliver in 1894, the Noiseless and the Underwood in 1896, the L. C. Smith and the Corona in 1904, the Royal in 1906, and the Woodstock in 1914. The Smithsonian Institute at Washington, D. C. has in its museum a very interesting exhibit of the development of the typewriter, showing all the different models and the various improvements as they were patented.

In our public schools the typewriter is already a familiar object. The commercial department, of course, looks upon it as a necessity; as a means of developing manual dexterity, it has many supporters, but if you were to inquire

of the school superintendents, you would probably be told that it is neither as a commercial nor as an industrial agent that its use is now so widely advocated by our leading educators. While they do not deny its importance in the business and manual training fields, it is on other grounds that they claim its increasing recognition. They would no doubt say that merely as an educator the typewriter has merits that are steadily bringing it into the foreground. One principal has gone so far as to say that even if the pupils never use it from the day they leave the classroom, it would still rank among the most important educational agents of recent times. This is putting it strongly, but I believe the experience of the past few years has done much to justify the statement. Its use exacts good work; it is a great corrector of careless, slipshod work. Professor Knowlton, the author of "The Educating Typewriter," has this to say:

> "Experience has shown that the advantages conferred by the typewriter are confined to no one subject. How many branches of primary and common school instruction it may ultimately cover, is a question for the future, but in the department of English, its empire is unlimited. At every step from the first study of the smallest words to the most advanced work in English composition, it is always ready to aid and encourage the pupil."

For a number of years after the typewriter was invented, it was operated entirely by sight and usually with two fingers only--in other words, by what we humorously call the "hunt and peck" system. This called for neither teacher nor text. The "touch" system was considered quite revolutionary and it took a long time before it was generally adopted by schools and operators throughout the country. Unfortunately, outside the field of typewriting, some educators still cling to the theory that the typewriter and the text are the only requirements in learning to typewrite, and where a teacher is employed, it is only to maintain order in the classroom, give out assignments, and, of course, to check the written work. This, however, is a very erroneous, out-of-date concept. Slowly but surely it has come to be recognized that if satisfactory results are to be obtained, the same pedagogical and psychological principles observed in the teaching of other subjects must be employed in teaching typewriting. Consequently, a technique of instruction has been created that demands good teaching ability. We should get away from the practice of permitting typewriting and other commercial subjects to be self-taught and acknowledge them for what they are--real courses that should be directed and supervised constantly and efficiently.

I might say right here that I have experienced this again and again in my classroom in the case of those pupils

who have come to us from the public schools. They have never been taught the principles underlying typewriting, nor given the necessary supervision, and have acquired, as a consequence, very faulty technique. When such a pupil comes to me, I always try to have him placed in the beginners' class or if his schedule will not permit that, I treat him as a beginner. As a matter of fact, he really requires more attention than a beginner, because it is necessary for him to unlearn his bad habits and substitute new correct ones and this he finds very difficult to do. Unless he possesses unusual will power and determination, he seldom wholly overcomes the careless habits formed in his first contact with the machine. The proper place to commence the development of skill in typewriting is at the very start.

This brings us to the question as to what are the essentials in the successful teaching of typewriting. I should say there are three--a good teacher, a good method and a good pupil. The lack of any one of the three may, and probably will, result in failure to secure the best results.

Let me refer briefly to what I consider the necessary preparation of a teacher of typewriting. In order best to meet the requirements of her specialty, the typewriting teacher must be well trained in the different phases of the commercial field. It follows that the better grounded a teacher is in general business procedure, the better she can set up objectives for her course and work toward correlating her activities with those closely related. Typewriting should not be taught as just a subject in itself, but should be adjusted to the pupil's entire program. The typewriting teacher who has had actual office experience, in addition to her business training, is that much better fitted to guide her students. Naturally, a liberal, cultural background is as great an asset to a teacher of typewriting as to a teacher of any other subject.

The theory of good typewriting can be quickly taught. One need but to say: "These keys are to be struck with the first finger, those keys with the second finger," and so on--but when you try to make the untrained hand carry out the orders, then you have a problem, or rather many problems. If this is true of the student with sight, how much more so is it true of the one without vision. Right here you may want to say: "I understood you to infer that all up-to-date schools now teach the 'touch' method." So they do as far as the actual fingering of the keyboard is concerned, but you must remember that while the sighted student does not look at the characters themselves, he does (even when his eyes are on his copy) visualize, to a greater or lesser extent, the machine in front of him. He sees its size and

shape, the movement of the carriage, the exact position of the line space lever, the writing on the platen. May I suggest, if you wish to get some idea of the actual situation faced by the person without sight when he sits down before a typewriter that you have someone tie a bandage over your eyes (let it be a close-fitting one) and lead you to a machine. You are then to set up the margins properly, insert your paper evenly, and write a short paragraph, a poem, a letter or anything you wish. This procedure will, I feel quite sure, acquaint you with some of the difficulties that must be surmounted by a sightless student who desires to become a proficient typist. At the best, however, it can only be for you a partial realization of the obstacles to be overcome, for, after all, you do know (having seen it many times), the exact size, shape and position of the typewriter on the desk.

There are two outstanding methods in the teaching of the keyboard. One is to begin with the use of the third and fourth fingers; the other with the first finger. I am of the firm opinion that the latter is by far the better method of the two, and I shall try to explain why I think so. It is always best to work along the line of least resistance. Any natural dexterity a beginner in typewriting may possess is invariably centered in the first fingers. For example, ask an average person to pick up something and nine times out of ten he will do it with the first finger and the thumb, not with the third and fourth fingers. How many of those who have learned to type without any instruction use their third and fourth fingers? It would seem, therefore, that the wisest way to begin is with the index finger. The student, at the beginning, has many things to learn--position at the machine, proper handling of the carriage, the touch, the memorizing of the keyboard, etc. These demand his close attention and if we also oblige him to use his weak untrained fingers, we are, I believe, putting an undue strain upon him and employing an illogical and uneducational method. The student should be gradually trained. As one writer has put it, "You cannot expect to get the seed until the flower has blossomed." My experience is that by the first finger method the student learns more rapidly and with less discouragement. The proponents of the third and fourth finger method contend that these are the weakest fingers and should be trained first, but they entirely lose sight of the fact that the student who has had no instruction in typewriting has no trained fingers. However, I do say this, after the student has mastered the first and second finger letters and reaches, he should be given throughout his typewriting course intensive drills involving the use of the third and fourth fingers.

I shall now attempt to describe, as far as that can be done in a paper such as this one, the first steps I take in teaching a class of beginners. I keep as nearly as practicable to the method employed by teachers of sighted students, but you can understand that it is necessary for me to make a number of changes, not only in my approach, but in the material I use. In most schools for the blind you will find, I judge, that the objectives of a course in typewriting are quite different from those in a school for the seeing. May I draw your attention to the fact that in the public schools the students, as a general thing, are not allowed to select this subject until at least their junior high school year, when they usually take it as part of the commercial course, whereas in schools for the blind we frequently permit them to take it as early as the fifth grade, our aim being merely to teach them to learn to type their school tests and other class work, as well as to write letters to their friends, rather than anything of a commercial nature, except in a few instances where they give evidence of sufficient intelligence and adaptability to warrant offering them further special training along commercial lines when they reach their third year in high school. I will refer to this again when I speak of our special work in Braille shorthand and dictaphone.

As all students coming into the typewriting room for the first time are anxious to commence striking the keys as soon as possible, I let them indulge this very natural impulse by confining my instruction on that first day to as few oral directions as possible. They are given a simple drill to enable them to locate the desk, the frame of the typewriter, space bar, first second, third and fourth banks of keys. The guide keys are then named and pointed out to them--asdf on the left side, ;lkj on the right side, as well as the finger to be used in operating each key. They must then be told about the platen, paper table, paper guide, line spacer lever and paper release and shown individually how to use these before they can begin to write. These parts of the machine, by the way, are the only ones I introduce for several weeks, for it is most unwise to burden their minds with too many new features at one time. With their fingers on the guide keys, I then have them practice all the first finger letters, both right and left hands, after which they are given words using those letters, such as truth, rhythm, bury, hurry, etc. The second finger is, in its turn, taken up in the same way. When they have memorized all the first and second finger letters and reaches, and have practiced many words containing them, I give them phrases and even very short sentences employing only first and second finger letters. In this way the students acquire a fairly good mastery of this central section of the keyboard before they pass on to the special training of the weak third and fourth fingers. We thus progress slowly but steadily until, by the beginning

of the second half of the school year, the students are able to write from dictation short paragraphs, simple poems, etc.

I wish to say that I follow, with very few exceptions, the oral method in teaching the first and second grades in typewriting; I have found it to be much more effective. We have in our library ten copies of one of the two systems of typewriting which have been put into Braille, but I do not use it. To my mind, it deals with the subject from the wrong angle; the students read too slowly and interpret the directions incorrectly. I have had put into embossed type in our printery a number of copies containing about twenty alphabetic sentences, some straight sentences and a few short paragraphs, which I occasionally give to certain students for practice outside the class or for memory work. In the classroom, however, I dictate all the material that is typed.

Coming to me from as low grades as they do, I can use very little of the material as printed in the textbooks on typewriting. It is necessary to gather it from many sources and adapt it to their use. Naturally I proceed (and that slowly) from the simple to the complex. These remarks apply particularly to Grades I and II in typewriting; in Grade III I try to bring in some of the more advanced business and letter forms, simple tabulation, etc.

Mental control and rhythm play a very important part in typewriting. I cannot do better than to quote here from a pamphlet issued by the Gregg Publishing Company:

"Mental control is more or less perfectly understood to mean the power of mind to govern physical conduct in an act of self-expression, and rhymical influence, stated broadly, is the playing out of this energy in such a way as to maintain a balanced state, or poise, or mind that induces uniform control of physical movements of the body. But the great teaching problem is how to impress an already acquired general knowledge of the principles on the student's mind in such a way that he may apply these principles to his own advantage while learning to typewrite. The object of all education, as I understand it, is to teach one to think straight, logically, accurately and in sequence. To accomplish this end, no small amount of patience and an intimate cooperation between students and teacher is necessary. What applies to all education naturally enough includes the art of typewriting, because typewriting is a mental act--a mode of self-expression.

"Rhythm, broadly stated, signifies symmetry, proportion and division and it suggests action that conforms to the laws of coordinated movement. Rhythmical adjustment naturally divides itself into multiples of 3 and 4 with the accent on the first count, as in 3-4 and 4-4 time in musical rhythm.

In typewriting it is any characteristic arrangement of letters in a word corresponding to the number of letters in that word."

I make use to a reasonable degree of the Rational Rhythm Records. The majority of my students are tense, and nervous and jerky in their physical movements, especially when they first come into the typewriting class and these records are helpful in assisting them to establish an even smooth stroke.

As to our equipment, I believe that it is advisable that all the typewriters should be of the same standard make, because class instruction, particularly in the beginning stages, can then be given more rapidly and be better understood. If more than one make of machine is used, it is necessary to have two sets of instructions and to give twice as many demonstrations. At first it is wiser for the student to master one machine rather than to have a smattering knowledge of several typewriters of different makes. In my opinion, our typewriting room could be improved by replacing our present chairs with specially adjusted typewriter chairs and I sincerely hope that this will be done in the near future.

I do not feel that I can close this part of my talk without touching upon the value of the typewriter as a developer of character. When a teacher is interested in her students not merely in the classroom but outside, it is quite possible for her to have short private conferences with those who are discouraged and not making headway and draw to their attention in a friendly, non-critical manner the faults, technical and otherwise, that are interferring with their progress. People have said to me that typewriting is a mechanical subject and a mechanical task; that is because they do not really understand what lies back of it. I contend that typewriting is an ideal medium through which to develop the character of our boys and girls.

There are many, many points in typewriting technique that I simply cannot cover tonight, for my time allotment is drawing to a close and I must still tell you, at least a little about our special work.

It has been our custom for a number of years to choose every other year two students (sometimes three or four if we have that many) who seemed to possess the necessary qualifications. I should like to stress this question of natural endowment, for it really forms the largest part of our nature. Training directs and strengthens our capacities, but no amount of training can make up for lack of natural endowment. To try to make this point clear to you, may I give you a few statistics gathered by a teacher in the

commercial field, who evidently feels as I do. He says:

"In our high schools there is a wide-spread belief among teachers as well as pupils, that the students who cannot succeed in the regular academic courses can take commercial and accounting courses. This is a mistake. The level of intelligence that will enable a student to take the training for shorthand is quite upon a par with that which brings success in academic subjects. To throw some light upon this matter, one of my students examined the records of a large number of girls in a well-known high school, beginning with the freshman year and following them through to the senior class. Thirty-five girls entered the academic course; 138 went into the commercial course; others took the household course. Twenty-four graduated from the academic course, showing a loss of eleven students in that course; thirty-four graduated from the course in commercial subjects, showing a mortality of 104. The school records of these 104 girls show that all had failed in one subject before coming to high school; 85 had failed in two subjects and more than half had failed in three or more. Therefore, it is plainly a mistake to suppose that success in commercial training is to be won by students inferior in natural endowment to those who make a success in general academic work."

I shall attempt to tell you now of the dictaphone practice as followed in this Institute. Our equipment consists of four machines--dictating machine, two transcribing machines and a shaving machine. We have been using these machines about eleven years and of course newer, greatly improved models have appeared during that period.

The principal working parts of the transcribing machine are: the mandrel, the steel cylinder on which the wax record revolves; the carriage control lever; the motor switch lever; this turns the electric current on and off; the speed adjustment and sound modifier screws; the back spacer; the cylinder ejector and the foot control. To reproduce a cylinder, we raise the carriage control lever and slide the carriage to the left-hand end of the machine; place the wax record on the mandrel, beveled end first; put the clarophone on the head and start the cylinder revolving by a quick, firm pressure of the foot on the foot control.

While every one knows of the wide use of the Dictaphone in the commercial world, it is not so generally recognized but it is used by many doctors, lawyers, and clergymen and also by many schools who find that it has a place in connection with their classroom work. I shall try to point out in a few words some of its values in relation to our school work. It helps materially with the spelling, for all the papers transcribed are corrected and the misspelled words brought to the attention of the operator; it develops initiative; it makes one concentrate to a marked degree, fo

there are the two machines, the dictaphone and the typewriter, to coordinate which necessitates making a mental note of the last word written on the typewriter before listening in for the following group on the cylinder, because if you do not do this, you are very apt to repeat the last word written. It also forces one to be on the lookout to catch any chance slip of the tongue by the dictator. As a matter of fact, a wise teacher purposely introduces these "slips of the tongue" in order to keep the student's mind strictly on what he or she is doing. As progress is made in coordinating the two machines, the punctuation marks are gradually withdrawn from the dictated material until only the paragraphing and the spelling of unusual words or proper names are dictated.

In teaching the Braille shorthand, I use the manual published by the National Institute of England and their Braille shorthand machine--the Stainsby-Wayne #14. In my judgment, Braille shorthand cannot hope to hold its own in the commercial world. By that I mean that I doubt very much if a Braille shorthand operator could compete successfully with a person with sight in either of the two outstanding shorthand systems--the Isaac Pitman and the Gregg systems. I shall name only three of my reasons for coming to this conclusion: first, the embossed system of shorthand is not as flexible and adaptable as the two just mentioned, nor is it as easily read back; second, the Braille shorthand machine is not speedy enough in action and is rather noisy in operation which is apt to be distracting to the average business man when he is dictating; third, like all copying done by the person without vision, it involves a double process--a constant movement of the hands back and forth from shorthand notes to typewriter, resulting in a great waste of time and energy.

The stenographic field has for many years been greatly overcrowded, and there are, as I am sure you appreciate, many thousands of competent, experienced stenographers, typists and dictaphone operators seeking openings. However, viewed from an educational standpoint, I think it is well worth while for every intelligent sightless person to master Braille shorthand, for by its use it is possible to take down dictation, or copy from Braille material at a much faster rate than could be done otherwise.

To become proficient in Braille shorthand it is necessary to memorize a great many contractions, word signs and phrases. The student learns first the initial, medial and final signs about twenty at a time. These signs appear in words which are dictated. followed later by short sentences containing both the signs and contractions. From sentences we pass to simple letter forms and then to more advanced work, such as editorials taken from magazines and newspapers,

essays, business letters and forms, until by the time the student has finished her second year of training she is able to take down fairly rapidly and transcribe accurately all kinds of dictated matter. Being unrestricted as to my choice of material, I am in a position to give my students dictation on many subjects, in that way enlarging their vocabulary and general background to an appreciable extent.

In our special work I also devote considerable time in an effort to develop in the student the ability to take dictation direct to the machine, as it is called, with speed and continuity. In individual practice it is possible to carry this on in a way that is quite impracticable in a classroom of twelve to fourteen students. I dictate timed tests, abstract matter of all kinds, business letters and forms, legal papers, tabulated lists, etc. A blind person who can take dictation direct to the machine with ease, accuracy and a good rate of speed has in just this one branch of the art of typewriting a really worth-while accomplishment.

While I hold firmly to my previous statement that a blind Braille shorthand writer cannot compete successfully with a stenographer with sight, I am at the same time strongly convinced that a well-trained blind dictaphone operator and rapid, accurate typist could be usefully and profitably employed in many of our philanthropic associations and best of all, in a number of our schools for the blind throughout the United States.

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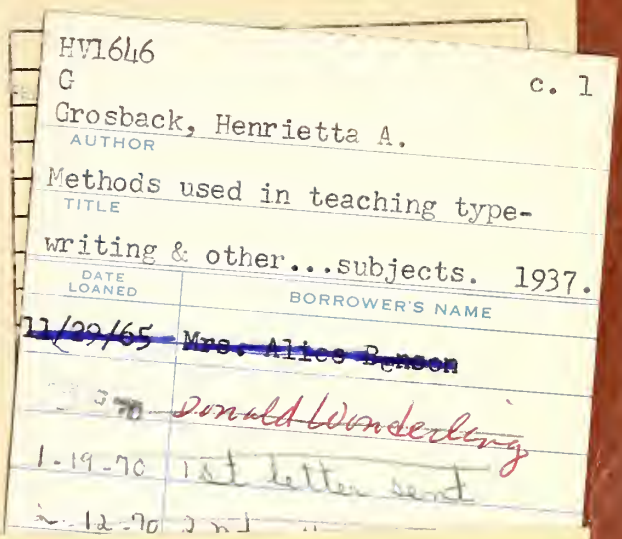

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